

Hassett Announces New DNR Grants To Help Clean Up Brownfields For Public Use

MADISON, Wis. – DNR Secretary Scott Hassett announced today that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has awarded 11 grants totaling \$1 million to 10 local communities to help clean up contaminated properties for public use.

The agency's Green Space and Public Facilities Grant Program is one of the first of its kind in the nation aimed at helping communities add public spaces and public buildings to urban areas through brownfields cleanup and reuse. Brownfields are abandoned, idle or underused industrial or commercial properties where redevelopment is hindered by real or perceived contamination.

Governor Doyle previously awarded two of the Green Space and Public Facilities Grants to the cities of Oshkosh and Fond du Lac. Today's announcement completes the list of Wisconsin municipalities receiving these grants. Doyle said "These brownfield grants are one of the many ways that DNR works cooperatively with local governments on development issues, as part of my "Grow Wisconsin" strategy. Wisconsin's nationally recognized brownfields initiative continues to demonstrate that good environmental stewardship can be compatible with growing Wisconsin's economy."

"Turning urban brownfields into parks, libraries and soccer fields is as critical to growing Wisconsin's economy as other factors," said Secretary Hassett. "This new program helps communities rid themselves of environmental threats and blighted structures and replace them with new green spaces and public facilities."

These 11 projects will have a positive impact on local communities. In addition to removing blighted buildings and contamination, they will also result in neighborhood improvements that will attract new homeowners and businesses. National studies have shown that the closer residential housing is to open spaces or parks, the higher the property value becomes.

Hassett noted how clearly the program is needed in Wisconsin. "We received almost twice the demand for this new grant program as we were able to fund", he said. "This is similar to the demand for other brownfield funds like DNR's Brownfield Site Assessment Grants. Once again we've seen the need that local governments are facing in addressing their contaminated properties."

Hassett added that the grant recipients were required to match state funding with 20-50 percent of their own dollars, for a total statewide match of half a million dollars. However, the 11 projects have actually pledged over \$3 million in local investments. Private investment stimulated by these redevelopment projects may lead to millions more in local improvements.

"These communities went above and beyond the required contribution and, combined with other potential state and federal grants, these projects will be great catalysts for future growth," said Hassett.

Hassett said these grants will lead to the reuse of nearly 200 acres of property, and that grant recipients have already performed environmental assessments for each project. The local governments will now apply their Greenspace and Public Facilities grants toward developing control and cleanup measures for soil and groundwater that contains hazardous substances.

The local governments receiving Wisconsin's first Greenspace and Public Facilities grants are:

Delavan: Ann Street Railroad Corridor Redevelopment, \$200,000 – Delavan is redeveloping the former Borg Manufacturing Property into a green-space and a storm-water retention area, which will be part of the overall redevelopment of the Ann Street corridor.

Milwaukee: Menomonee River Valley West End Redevelopment, \$200,000 – The Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee is developing a former Milwaukee Road workshop into an innovative storm-water treatment park, community ball fields, part of the Hank Aaron State Trail and public access to the Menomonee River.

Oshkosh: Riverside Park, \$200,000 – Oshkosh is expanding Riverside Park with a new amphitheater and developing a river-walk and convention center on the site of several brownfields, including one that contained a coal gas production plant.

Milwaukee: Garden Park, \$125,000 – The Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee is creating a neighborhood park, garden and farmers market at the location of the blighted, tax delinquent turn-of-the-century Pulaski Building. This is a partnership project for the city, the neighborhood association and Milwaukee Urban Gardens.

Kenosha: Bain Elementary School & Kenosha School of Language, \$84,585 – The city of Kenosha and the Kenosha Unified School District are turning a former twelve-acre railroad and automotive storage yard into a new school and sports field that will replace two dilapidated and overcrowded schools.

Madison: Isthmus Park, \$87,745 – Madison is cleaning up a 3-acre parcel contaminated with petroleum and heavy metals. This property will become part of the new Isthmus Park, included in 25 acres of park-land planned for the 172-acre East Rail Corridor area. This area will also eventually contain community gardens, a cultural center and an outdoor amphitheater.

Fond du Lac: Park and Trail, \$50,000 – Fond du Lac is turning the former Quick Freeze Superfund site into a small park with a trail along the Fond du Lac River. A portion to the east will be privately developed for multifamily housing or other uses.

Town of Geneva: Township Park, \$25,449 – The town of Geneva is cleaning up two former gas stations to create the town's first park, at the entrance to the Lake Como subdivision.

City of West Allis, \$18,221 – West Allis is developing soccer fields and a parking area on a former city landfill. The greenspace grant will help the city add clean soil and reconfigure the surface for athletic fields in compliance with state requirements for closed landfills.

Eau Claire: Phoenix Park, \$5,000 – The city of Eau Claire is developing a new farmers market at the site of a former foundry and battery salvage yard. This is part of a larger redevelopment project with offices, a trail, play areas, and parking.

Waukesha: Hoover Park Recreational Area, \$4,000 – Waukesha is developing a picnic area, playground, rest-rooms and parking for new soccer fields on four blighted commercial properties on the edge of the West Avenue landfill.

The State Legislature approved funding for the Greenspace and Public Facilities Grant Program after the Brownfields Study Group, a state-wide advisory task force, recommended creation of the program in their 2000 Report. More information about Greenspace and Public Facilities grants and other potential brownfield funding is available on DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment Program web site at www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/rr/financial/index.htm.

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